



Building Budget Process

Frequently Asked Questions

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Q1: What are the considerations in the budget process?

A: All decisions made by leaders and staff in SPS schools and programs must use the SPS Racial Equity Analysis Tool and make decisions in line with the building's or program's Racial Equity Action Plan. This should be one of the first steps taken in the budget process.

The budget, the professional development plan, and the Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP) are all under the responsibilities of the Building Leadership Team (BLT) for development and implementation.

Basic funding comes in staffing funds as laid out in the Weighted Staffing Standards (WSS) and the CBA, Non-Employee Related Costs (NERCs), and some discretionary funding not specifically directed by the district.

Q2: What are Weighted Staffing Standards (WSS) and how do they affect building staffing?

A: WSS are used by the budget office to make staffing allocations to buildings based on projected enrollment for the following year. WSS are based on several factors, but primarily the standards seek to support the basic education program for students as defined by OSPI, federal regulations, and the CBA. Building/program supervisors typically receive staffing FTE numbers from the district's budget office in mid to late February. The projected FTE is compared with the building's current staffing to determine if the building will need to make displacement or hiring decisions. WSS can be found in the district's "Gold Book" put out by the district each year.

Q3: What are Non-Employee Related Costs (NERCs)?

A: These will be the equipment and supplies for the office and for staff, and all the other costs that are not part of payroll.

Q4: What staffing is required by the CBA?

A: Caseload caps, ratios and class size limits given in the CBA drive some fte funding. The number of IAs in a specific SPED classroom comes from contract, as do the caseload calculations for most ESA groups. There are additional stipends bargained for some roles, and some roles have additional days paid for services outside the regular calendar. The BLT should be familiar with the terms of the contract.

Q5: Who decides which staff are displaced?

A: When the school's projected enrollment drops (e.g. kindergarten goes from 3 to 2 classrooms, or students identified for resource goes from 46 to 32), there is generally little choice where displacements occur. Principals will look at the projections and should notify all staff who may be displaced. This must happen to meet contract and district policy. The BLT should still have the information and consider it in their budget work.

In the partnership agreement in Article II, Section A.4, the Building Leadership Team (BLT) is charged with creating and sharing the budget with building staff. Ideally, the

budget numbers should be shared with the BLT at the earliest opportunity for consideration. The BLT is also charged with creating and implementing the Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP) so if changes must be made to basic education programming and any additional offerings, the BLT should discuss options. These options may include how to implement displacements while maintaining discretionary programming supported by building staff.

Q6: What are discretionary funds?

A: The basic education positions are part of the budget but not all of it. Students also need art, music, PE, technology education, and similar content areas and all teachers need PCP time. Buildings will have some FTE that is not specifically designated to a position or content area. The BLT may consider seeking a waiver from the contract to create more options, or an outside grantor or Community Based Organizations (CBO) like a PTSA may offer funds. These are funds that the BLT can use to offer options in the building budget process, and it is typically these options that come to the staff for a vote.

Q7: What is a waiver?

A: A waiver is a request to deviate from contract or policy that permits a building or program to implement a modification to their budget/instructional model that would otherwise be a violation of the contract or policy. The most common waivers that SEA and SPS consider are contract waivers from provisions in the CBA or WSS waivers from the “Gold Book” allocation standards used by the district’s budget office to determine FTE allocations for buildings and programs. There are other waivers from state and federal agencies that appear at times but are far less common.

WSS waivers are prepared by the BLT and submitted to the district for approval. SEA does not review or approve these waivers.

Contract waivers are covered in Article I, Section F of the CBA. These waiver requests are also prepared by the BLT but then require a staff vote in the building or program through the same process as a budget vote. See *Who gets to vote on a budget proposal in that staff vote?* below. Waiver requests must include the provisions being waived, the rationale for the waiver, and confirmation of the 2/3 vote. The waiver request is then submitted to the SEA Waiver Committee for review. The SEA Waiver Committee makes a recommendation to either approve or deny the waiver to the SEA Board of Directors. Ultimately, it’s the Board of Directors who determines whether they

grant the waiver request or not. Contract waivers are generally for three years but require a yearly review at the building level to be maintained.

Q8: Does that mean that the staff vote only applies to those options?

A: No. When a staff takes a vote on the budget presented by the BLT, the entire budget is part of that vote and a failure to get the required yes votes means the entire budget is rejected and cannot proceed to the budget arena.

Q9: What is the budget arena?

A: When the district provides numbers to the building administration, that building or program also gets a date to come down to JSCEE and present the budget to a team of district administrators for review and acceptance. Typically, it is the principal who appears at these arena presentations, but many principals recognize that it is good practice and in keeping with the spirit of the partnership agreement to bring along a BLT member or two. Missing an arena date means rescheduling and delay so principals do not want to miss these dates.

Q10: Who gets to vote on a budget proposal in that staff vote?

A: This is a process bargained by SEA members. Under the terms of the contract, every staff person represented by SEA must be counted in that vote (whether they are a member or potential member). The requirement for passing a budget is a yes vote by 2/3 of these SEA represented staff. Since only positive votes count, any non-voters become negative votes. (E.g., if there are 22 total SEA-represented staff, 14 staff vote yes, 2 vote no, and 6 do not vote- this budget is rejected because 14 is not 2/3 of the total staff.)

Q11: Why don't principals or other building administrators have a vote on budget?

A: The contract defines the voting body as all SEA-represented staff, and administration is not represented by SEA, so they don't vote with the staff. Keep in mind that the BLT does its own vote on which options to present to the staff, and as members of the BLT, administrators do have a vote on the budget options.

Q12: What happens when a budget does not get enough votes?

A: When a building staff votes down a budget, the BLT will meet to consider revising the options for a new vote. If the building staff is unable to come to consensus or agreement, the contract calls for the district and SEA to send representatives to attempt to mediate an agreement on the budget.

If mediation fails to achieve agreement, the budget is sent to district administration for a final decision. This is most often the proposed budget and/or options that had the most support, but not always. Few budgets actually fail.

The BLT should distinguish between polling or surveying staff for input on options and taking a vote on the budget. A BLT that puts too many options out in the vote may find it difficult to reach 2/3s on any one option. Better to survey members with the options and/or meet to discuss them before going to the vote. That gives input on which option(s) has the most support before a vote is taken. SEA encourages BLTs to put forward no more than two options for the staff to vote on.

Q13: Do staff have a right to see the whole budget?

A: Yes. School budgets are public records subject to public records requests. If your administrator refuses to share the documents, you can make a public records request for that document from SPS. Also contact your AR because this is a concern your AR should be aware of. You may need some assistance in reading and understanding the budget. SEA has some members who are trained and experienced with budgets who may be able to assist.

Q14: Why is the district telling our principal to eliminate .5 positions?

A: Historically, many Seattle schools have supported job-share situations or part-time work for staff who only want part-time. This was a building level decision by the BLT and staff who found it useful for supporting staff and students. When our healthcare moved to the state-run healthcare program (School Employees Benefit Board or SEBB), decisions to staff part-time positions were impacted.

SEBB mandates employers to provide full benefits to all employees 0.5FTE and above and to send to the state the full premium cost for each employee at 0.5 or higher FTE. SEBB is not FTE based; all FTE 0.5 and above get the same benefit. Last year, the district gave out guidance that the district would not fund job-shares or 0.5 positions created by the buildings. The district also determined that the extra cost of benefits for these employees would come from the building budget and not the district. There are still 0.5 positions generated by the budget office projections based on enrollment, and the district will cover these. We will update this FAQ if we obtain new information related to this.